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ABSTRACT

A discussion of the practice and theory in the teaching of language for specific purposes (LSP) focuses on the ways in which the LSP experience, and especially experience in English for specific purposes (ESP), compels a new evaluation of certain theoretical positions in applied linguistics and second language learning. It concludes that: (1) the major problem in identifying the theoretical base of ESP stems from the confusion between a model of a theory of language and a model of a theory of language learning; (2) the success of LSP may be accounted for only when it is understood that linguistic competence comes from language in use in specific situations; (3) LSP uses teaching strategies that are incompatible with certain theories of language learning; (4) language can be learned in a variety of ways, but the use of language is learned in appropriate contexts; and (5) in most cases, the teaching of language involves much more than providing the optimum circumstances for acquisition, and the teacher is also responsible for teaching aspects of language use that must be taught even to native speakers: cultural conventions and the system and uses of literacy. Six pages of references are included. (MSE)

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Languages for specific purposes: practice and theory

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LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES: PRACTICE AND THEORY

by

Meriel Bloor and Thomas Bloor

0 INTRODUCTION

In this paper we look at practice and theory in the teaching of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP); in particular, we are concerned with the ways in which the LSP experience compels a new evaluation of certain theoretical positions in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition.

Most of our experience and exemplification comes from the field of *English* for Specific Purposes (ESP), but at the theoretical level we are concerned with the teaching and learning of *language*, and our conclusions can be generalized for any language, not only English. We begin by looking at the rapid recent development of ESP and discussing reasons that have been offered for this. We propose, however, that, although ESP is "a pragmatic approach to a developing situation", as Mackay and Mountford (1978, p.1) put it, we need to investigate more than practice and practical influences in order to account for its success.

Practice in LSP teaching, in England and overseas, frequently differs considerably from that proposed by language teaching theorists. In this paper, we consider two areas where this difference

is clearly apparent. Broadly, these concern questions of the *grading* and *specificity* of the language that learners are exposed to on a course (the "linguistic input"). LSP practice tends towards the use of specific language and "difficult" (although relevant) linguistic input, whereas current acquisition theory tends towards the view that input should be immediately comprehensible but a little beyond the learner's present competence (see, for example, Krashen 1985, p.2). In addition, applied linguistic theory still clings to the Common Core Hypothesis (or rather - as we explain - a corrupted version of the Common Core Hypothesis), holding that something called "general English" will necessarily take first place chronologically in the learning of a language.

We claim that courses designed to fulfil specific needs, drawing on specific language, can lead to the acquisition of general linguistic competence, but also that the effective use of language in specific situations often requires more than "acquired" linguistic competence. It also requires knowledge of learned systems. We explain how certain established theories are challenged by this view.

In 1980, Robinson expressed the view that "in ELT, and more particularly in ESP, linguistic and applied linguistic theory lags behind teaching and learning practice" (p.32). While her position is probably no longer tenable with respect to linguistic theory (particularly in view of the developments in discourse analysis and pragmatics), we argue that it is still the case that applied linguistic theory in some respects lags behind ESP practice.

1 THE SUCCESS OF ESP

There can be little doubt that ESP is successful as an approach to English Language Teaching. Leaving aside for a while the question of what we can attribute that success to, let us briefly consider some of the recent developments.

Robinson (1980) described the rapid growth that had taken place in the previous ten to fifteen years in the field of ESP, and this growth has not diminished since then. It can be measured in terms of the number of ESP courses, publications, and teacher training programmes around the world. Universities everywhere now offer non-degree courses in English for various academic purposes (and often in other languages as well), and the teaching of languages for business purposes is becoming increasingly important as a part of management training.

In the case of publications, John Swales, who set up the first archive of papers on ESP, first at the University of Khartoum and later at Aston University, illustrates the expansion with the following chart of the approximate number of acquisitions (Swales 1985, p.x):

Date	Number of items
1972	30
1975	60
1978	150
1981	400
1984	1300

In the past five years ESP magazines and journals around the world have flourished, albeit with small circulations, and a major international journal (the *ESP Journal*, Washington) has been established.

There are now at least two master's degree courses in Britain with major components in ESP, and ESP is available as an option on most Applied Linguistics MA courses. The growth in ESP textbook production, something many publishers said would never happen, has, of course, been phenomenal.

2 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ESP

ESP, particularly English for Commercial Purposes, has its origins deep in the history of language teaching (see Howatt 1984, p.218), but here we consider factors which have contributed to its recent development.

In many countries where, in the mid twentieth century, English still had an imperialist role, a resentment towards the learning of the language grew rapidly, particularly among the politicized students of newly independent countries in Africa, who were seeking to assert their own cultural identities. Since they did not wish to identify with the culture, language or literature of the previous ruling power, English was welcome only as a means to an end, - that is, if it could contribute to economic, political and technological independence. Thus, English as a means of access to science, technology, business, international law and world diplomacy was encouraged, whereas traditional university English (literature or language for access to European culture) was devalued and became peripheral.

A related reason for the growth of ESP was an economic one. A rapid increase in numbers in the education system necessitated a reduction in English as the medium of instruction at primary and secondary level, but because English remains the

lingua franca of academic and professional life, it is a prerequisite for tertiary students. Because of the shortage of resources (particularly of time and well-qualified teachers), it became essential to establish priorities in education. This led to arguments for ESP courses on the basis of priority ("We don't have time to teach everything") and consequently on the basis of target need ("We teach the skills that are most important for their course/job").

It is, of course, learners' needs that have most often been offered as the justification for ESP courses and that have provided the most popular definition of the subject, that given by Munby (1978, p.2):

> ESP courses are those where the syllabus and materials are determined in all essentials by the prior analysis of the communication needs of the learner.

It is claimed that courses based on Needs Analysis are more efficient because they get their priorities right, and also, as a corollary, that they are educationally more effective because they are *motivating*. Motivation is known to be a strong psychological force influencing success in all types of learning, not least in language learning. Steven McDonough (1981, pp.142-56), in a chapter which summarizes the evidence from psychological studies, claims with justification that "most teachers will agree that the motivation of students is one of the most important factors influencing their success or failure in learning the language". Stevick (1971) identified five types of "reward" that are available to course designers and teachers. The first of these is glossed by McDonough (1981, p.143) as "Relevance - of the content to the students' own language needs", and it is this type of relevance

that has most frequently been identified as the basis for the success of LSP courses. (See Robinson 1980, pp.26-31 and Kennedy and Bolitho 1984, pp.14-16 for further discussion of the literature relating to student motivation and the analysis of needs.) To conclude this section then, factors that have been seen to have contributed to the development of ESP are primarily political and economic. As a direct result of these forces, courses have proved to be motivating, and motivation is, in fact, the only directly educational factor that has been offered as an explanation for LSP's success. But can we leave it here, satisfied that the phenomenon has been accounted for?

While we in no way discount the importance of such factors in explaining the growth and success of ESP courses, we suggest that any success that has been achieved in language learning must be attributable to additional factors that have not yet been seriously investigated. These take us into the realms of linguistic and psycholinguistic theory.

3 APPROACHES TO THEORY

In spite of the rapid growth of ESP/LSP in Europe and around the world, there have been problems (or possibly a lack of will, in the context of the ongoing day-to-day struggle of running language courses) in establishing a theoretical basis which can (a) account for its success and (b) be extended to other types of language teaching. Work in second language acquisition has understandably ignored LSP as a separate phenomenon, and within Applied Linguistics apologists for LSP, at least at the theoretical level, have been few.[1]

In a published conversation,[2] Brumfit comments:

> I think ESP is more a social phenomenon in some ways than a theoretical one. It's social in the sense that ESP is only possible if you can construct classes out of similar sets of individuals.[3]

As we have already said, there is little doubt that socio-economic pressures are a driving force in establishing ESP programmes, and Brumfit is right to emphasize the social aspect. But to dismiss ESP as merely a "social phenomenon" is to disregard the fact that the "psychological" and "linguistic" aspects of language learning have to be accounted for.

A serious attempt to address the theoretical issue was made by Widdowson in his book *Learning Purpose and Language Use* (1983). One of Widdowson's essential messages is, however, that an ESP programme has to be "located on a scale of specificity" and that the more "specific" the course, the more restricted the competence of the learner will be. A course where the "objectives" are equivalent to the "aims" leads to "training" rather than "education", according to Widdowson, and "training" is seen as the development of merely a "restricted competence". "It should be recognized", he writes, "that such confinement, no matter how justified it may be on other grounds, runs counter to educational principles" (p.108). If Widdowson were discussing a "content" subject (such as History), the notion of "restriction" would be more meaningful, but since it is the case that he is discussing *language learning*, we must question what this type of restricted competence might be. It is difficult to conceive of a restricted competence, in terms of actual language use, that could be a reasonable "goal" for a language course. This

is not to say, however, that a course should not be selective or "specific". All courses, by their nature, have to select the contexts of language use. What is at issue here is the relationship between linguistic input and language acquisition. We take up this issue in Section 5 as part of our discussion of the Common Core hypothesis.

Widdowson favours a type of ESP course design that is "not determined by eventual aims but decided on by reference to pedagogic objectives" (p.107). "It matters less," he claims, "that a course should incorporate the language of a specific purpose than that the language it contains should lead to purposeful activity" (*ibid.*). According to Widdowson, the "purposeful activity" approach would be closer to "education" than "training". We find it difficult to accept any dichotomy between "purposeful activity" and the "language of a specific purpose", particularly since most of the better ESP courses incorporate both. In the next section, on ESP practice, we offer some examples of such courses, discussed particularly from the point of view of methodology.

ESP teaching often combines the most traditional with the most modern classroom practices, presenting an apparently paradoxical situation from the point of view of learning theory. This has been described as an "eclectic" approach, but this label is, of course, unenlightening as to the reasons for the success or failure of a teaching programme. It is important to try to account for the paradox.

4 TASK-ORIENTED TEACHING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Many ESP courses use what might be called a task-oriented approach to methodology. Others go further and base the whole course on a topic-and-task syllabus (see, for example, Reynolds 1982). The accounts of such courses are not very well known in the field of Applied Linguistics or English Language Teaching. They are either unpublished or have appeared in journals that are not widely read except by LSP specialists. Our evidence for this is that they are rarely referred to by applied linguists. Widdowson, for example, while regretting that "methodology has generally been neglected in ESP" (1983, p.87), fails to refer to some of the most significant reports of methodological experiments.

We would like to describe three examples of task-oriented approaches commonly used on ESP courses; they illustrate ESP practice that is relevant to our subsequent discussion of learning theory. The first was named by its originators (Edge and Samuda 1981) the *Methodials* approach, since it was seen to conflate course materials and methodology. It was not designed exclusively for ESP, although the original materials were for Medical English. Briefly, for each unit of work, the students are set a task to perform or a problem to solve. Each unit then has three stages: Information Search, Information Exchange, and Information Synthesis. During the Information Search stage, the students, working in groups, are engaged in discovering facts or opinions (related to the solution of the task) from a variety of appropriate related sources. These may include written or spoken materials, and so some groups might be reading, others might be listening to recordings, watching video, or talking to people who have the

information. During the Information Exchange stage, the students pool the information that has been gathered, and the findings are sorted and classified as is necessary for the particular task in hand. This stage will always involve discussion and often some type of writing. The final stage, Information Synthesis, is the actual use of the information to complete the task or solve the problem.

During each of these three stages the students are engaged in "meaningful use" of the target language. To this extent, Methodials subscribes to the view that learners acquire the language subconsciously while the conscious mind is focussed on meaning. However, Edge and Samuda also build into the model what they call "systems support". By "systems" they mean the grammatical, phonological, and other systems of the language, which are "crucial to successful language learning", and the learning of which, they believe, can be supported by the teacher through direct teaching and the introduction of practice activities, as necessary, to help the students complete the Information Synthesis stage. This is an example of a paradoxical situation: if the linguistically ungraded meaningful input is the prerequisite of acquisition, what is the role of "systems support"? If it works (and the evidence is that it does), what are the implications for current theories of language acquisition? We take up this point below in Section 7.

The Methodials approach has a lot in common with much of the project work which is used in EAP and EOP teaching. A particularly interesting example was Herbolich's (1979) work on "Box Kites". Working in the University of Kuwait, Herbolich set up a student project, designed to teach his students to understand and write technical manuals. In the course of this work, each student was re-

quired to design, manufacture and fly a box kite, and ultimately to compose and produce an instructions manual for the kite. It was an important underlying principle that in order to write a manual you must understand the mechanism and construction of what you are writing about. A very complex piece of course design was involved in the project, incorporating reading, discussion, organization, production, reporting, and so on.

Other types of project work are also very common in ESP, which, like Herbolich's project, often involve the use of original, authentically used written and spoken English (see, for example, Robinson 1978 and Bloor and St John 1985). That is to say, they require the student to tackle the comprehension of unsimplified texts, which were not originally produced as language teaching materials.

The use of such materials was advocated in an influential article by Phillips and Shettlesworth (1975), which stressed the disparity that can arise between the demands of materials with a pedagogic objective and the requirements of the subject matter of the students' special fields. The result of simplification, they pointed out, can often be counter-productive in that students quickly become aware of the gap between the language presented in the language class and the language which they need in order to read their subject text book or talk about their company's products or whatever it may be that they use the language for. For this and other reasons that space prevents us from summarizing here, the tendency on most courses has been to use original or only slightly adjusted texts for listening and reading, even with students whose English is minimal and even, in some cases in our experience, with beginners.

Of course, in such cases, the selection of texts is particularly important, and the uses to which the materials are put are crucial. Special techniques have been designed to help the learner get to grips with difficult original texts. Jo McDonough's *Listening to Lectures* (1978), for example, provides the learner with a specialized lecture on an appropriate topic and a detailed worksheet to assist in making this and further lectures comprehensible. A beginner in the language may do little more with a learned journal than recognize that the title of a paper is relevant to his research interests (and depending on his first language, he may need a dictionary to do this). But if this is what is required of him as a preliminary exercise and it is relevant to his needs, it is likely to be a successful learning experience.

This type of approach to course design has been called by Johnson (1982, pp.192-200) the "Deep End Strategy", which is to say that the students are first placed in a situation where they need to use the language and are then taught the language they need. Johnson points out that the strategy "will offend traditionalists in a number of ways" and discusses this from the pedagogic standpoint.

By "traditionalists" Johnson probably meant practitioners of the audio-lingual school, and the Deep End Strategy clearly challenges behaviourist language learning principles (see, for example, Lado 1964) and places itself squarely in the communicative camp. But it also challenges the more fashionable Input Hypothesis discussed by Krashen (see Krashen 1985) and the Teachability Hypothesis of Pienemann (1985). The former requires "natural input ... roughly tuned to the learner's level of acquisition", that is comprehensible or only a little

more difficult than the present level of the learner (the "i + 1" formula); the latter allows for teaching of structures graded to match natural acquisition order. The Deep End Strategy, contrary to both these hypotheses, permits input that may be initially incomprehensible, but which is comprehended - and even then sometimes only in part - by the detailed study of whatever language items present problems in the context. This gradual movement towards comprehension of the input might be assisted by the overt explanation of the text by a teacher, by the use of dictionaries or other reference materials, or even by translation.

But before returning to the important role of teaching and study in ESP and their relationship to language acquisition, we would like to take up another theoretical construct which has not undergone much discussion in recent years, namely the Common Core.

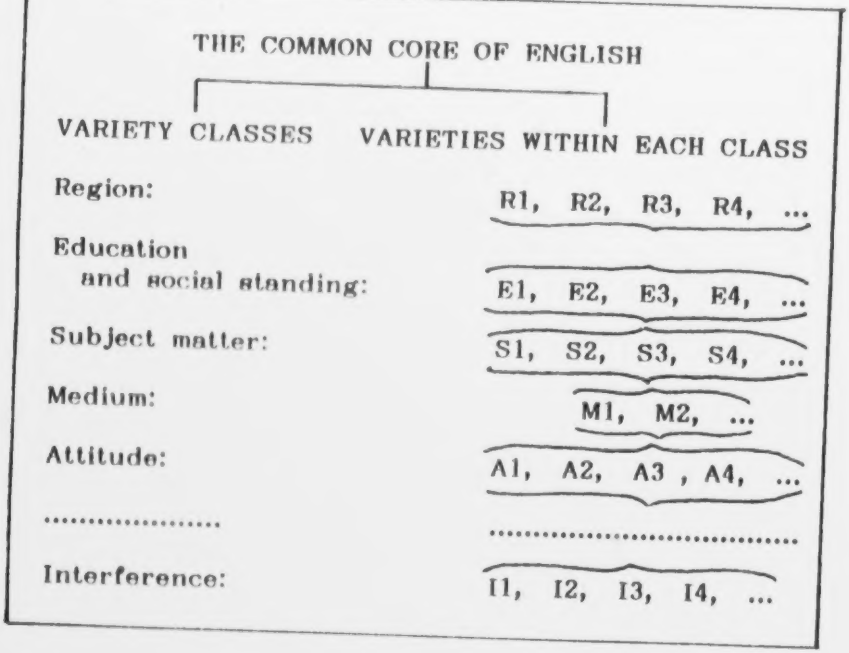
5 LSP AND THE COMMON CORE HYPOTHESIS

The Common Core hypothesis is central to applied linguistics as we know it. Its relevance to course design has rarely been questioned even by advocates of semantic syllabuses, who have incorporated their perception of the Common Core into their syllabuses at the level of the linguistic exponents of functions and notions. This has usually been done by advocating a "cyclic" syllabus like that suggested by Wilkins (1976, p.59), where "at the lowest level" the functions are used "in the simplest and least differentiated manner".

It is not our purpose here to discuss extensions of the term "common core", such as have been introduced in recent years to cover some

kind of basic or central semantics. The term has been used to cover the common notional syllabus (such elements as "measurement" and "shape") as used in the *Nucleus English* series. The term has also been used in ESP to refer to texts (or other linguistic input) which are suitable for use with heterogeneous groups of learners such as those on Study Skills courses (see, for example, Kennedy and Bolitho 1984, p.50). These are different uses of the term, which have no relation to the applied linguistic hypothesis except in so far as they use the word "common" with its normal meaning of belonging to all or many members of a set.

We are concerned in this paper with the classic presentations of the hypothesis, as found in the



work of Quirk et al. (1972), Corder (1973), and Leech and Svartvik (1975), and the effect that the hypothesis has had on the construction of syllabuses and the selection of teaching materials. Quirk et al. (1972, pp.13f.) present the diagram reproduced opposite, in which the Common Core dominates all varieties. They explain the diagram by saying that "however esoteric or remote a variety may be, it has running through it a set of grammatical and other characteristics that are present in all others."

A year later, Corder (1973, p.65) describes the Common Core, keeping what is essentially the same concept, but introducing the dimension of the language syllabus in the final clause (our italics):

> A language can be regarded as a "constellation of dialects". These dialects are related to each other linguistically by possessing a major part of their grammatical systems in common. I shall refer to this as the common core, *which forms the basis of any syllabus.*

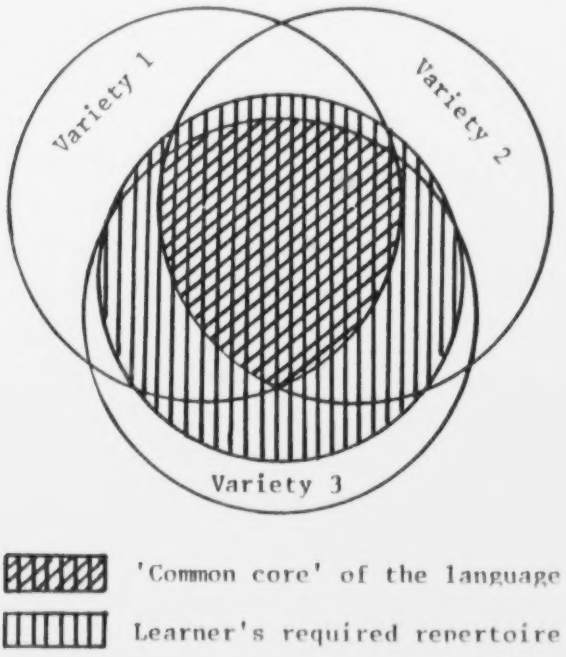
It is necessary to think about what Corder may have meant by "basis" in this passage. Although it is not clear that this is precisely what he intended, he has often been interpreted as meaning the "first stage" of a course, as in such statements as the following (from Robinson 1980, p.17):

> Most writing about ESP is concerned with students in tertiary education who have a grounding, albeit inadequate, in "common core" English.

Quirk et al. also clearly held the view that this type of general grounding was very important in language courses, for they wrote (1972, p.29):

Attempts to teach a "restricted" language ("English for Engineers") too often ignore the danger in so doing of trying to climb a ladder which is sinking in the mud; it is no use trying to approach a point on the upper rungs if there is no foundation.

Since ESP practitioners are clearly ignoring their advice, we might ask what it is exactly that this "grounding", "foundation", or "core" actually consists of. The diagram presented by Pit Corder is usually used to facilitate explanation:



Although this is presented in relation to "dialect", he does, by extension, use it to illustrate register. The central shaded section of the conjoined circles

represents the part of the grammatical system (including lexis) that all varieties have in common.

Leech and Svartvik (1975, Chapter 1) clearly hold the view that the Common Core consists of certain words and sentences that can be used "safely" in all situations. Although they say that "many of the features of English are found in all, or nearly all, varieties" and that "general features of this kind belong to the "common core" of the language", they then go on to approach the matter from the reverse position and present, not features of the language, but actual instances of language as "common core". Hence (1) below is given as an example of the Common Core (and therefore presumably as a suitable example for language learners), while (2) fails to achieve that distinction.

(1) Peter's wife was very angry when he came home with the girl from the discotheque

(2) Pete's old woman hit the roof when he came home with that doll from the disco

This, to us, confused view abandons the "common features" approach in favour of a classification of utterances as "common core" or not. The common features approach would have identified the subordinator "when" and the singular masculine pronoun "he", for example, as elements of the Common Core of English. These features might be found in any variety of English, including the informal example (2).

Corder, at least in his 1973 description, does not equate the Common Core with some type of unmarked variety of English, as Leech and Svartvik

appear to do. On the contrary, he concedes (unlike Quirk et al.) that

> the possession of the common core alone does not enable a learner to behave appropriately in any particular situation; to do this he needs to know those parts of the code appropriate to that situation *not* included in the common core. (p.65)

This might appear to present no theoretical problems and leave the way open for an ESP approach to teaching, but we would still like to question its validity.

It is clear from this quotation that Corder understood the Common Core to be nothing more than an abstraction, a construct that would include those linguistic items that are common to all varieties: such items as the plural morpheme, phonological rules, verb inflections (*-ed*, for example), word order, and perhaps "the first thousand most common word types", which account for "90 per cent of all word tokens used", mentioned by him later in the book (p.214). Now there clearly is a problem here. We question firstly whether it is possible to conceive of a learner who has a grounding in such elements unless they have been learned within the context of some variety or pseudo-variety (so-called classroom English, for example). Certainly when we come to the classroom we find it necessary to present the basic elements in some kind of linguistic context. Unless we simply talk *about* the target language using the learner's mother tongue, we need, at the very least, to select instances of language to exemplify the forms. And yet two years after his exposition of the theoretical construct, Corder himself (1975, p.9) writes:

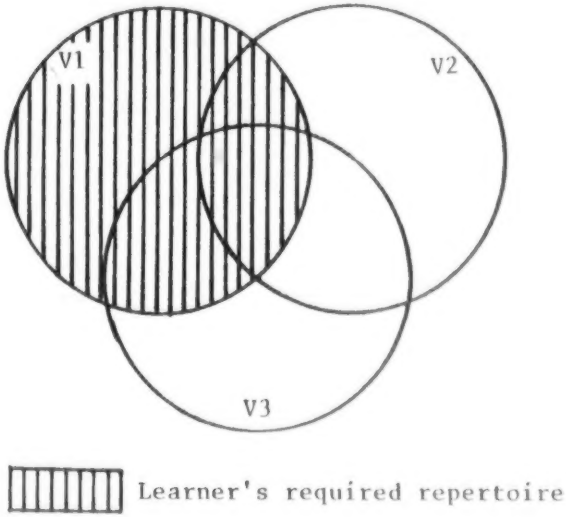
> Where the aims of the learner are not known or diffuse [...] we must attempt to establish what are the basic elements of a knowledge of the language which anyone must possess in order to use it for any purpose. This central body of knowledge is sometimes known as "the common core".

This once more seems to be a call for the creation of some type of proto-variety, some general "basic" English that is suitable for many (if not all) situations, similar to the type of English that Leech and Svartvik claim actually exists.

The problem for approaches of this type is that the Common Core does not exist *as a language variety*. It is as much an idealization as Chomsky's "ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech-community" (1965, p.3). It is doubtful whether Corder, in view of most of his writings on the subject, seriously believes that such a variety could be realized; his diagrammatic representation (reproduced above) offers the Common Core as no more than an abstraction at the linguistic level.

The confusion seems to arise from the unhappy transfer of a model of language to a model of language learning. This unhappy shift of focus has caused many problems for the course designer. A speaker of any variety does, by definition, have command of the Common Core; he cannot have command of the Common Core independently of a variety. No speaker can have command of the Common Core in a vacuum. Hence there is no reason whatsoever why the Common Core cannot be acquired from a so-called "special" variety just as well as from a more usual classroom variety. Whether one is studying English for Engineering, English for Business, or English for Economics, one will inevitably acquire the "core" of the language. This

is demonstrated in the following diagram, which illustrates what could be called "The LSP Model":



The "core" of the language is, of course, an essential part of any one of the innumerable varieties of the language.

6 THE QUESTION OF VARIETIES

Up to this point we have assumed the validity of the concept of "variety" in language. However, although it seemed necessary to concede this concept in order to present our case against the Common Core, it is itself a theoretical construct that has already been seriously challenged. Hudson (1980, Chapter 2) argues that the boundaries between varieties (including, of course, registers,

which are "varieties according to use", as defined by Halliday, McIntosh and Strevens 1964) are so difficult to establish that the only satisfactory way to solve the problems that result is "to avoid the notion 'variety' altogether as an analytic or theoretical concept" (p.71). Hudson prefers an "item-based" model of language in which "each linguistic item is associated with a social description which says who uses it, and when". Thus, to use Hudson's examples, *We obtained some sodium chloride* is distinguished from *We got some salt* by describing the former as "formal, technical" and the latter as "informal, non-technical". There are, of course, many social dimensions in addition to "formal" and "technical" that determine linguistic realizations (see Crystal and Davy 1969 for a discussion of some of the dimensions of situational constraint), and a well-developed model of this type would necessarily be complex.

In spite of its complexity, this way of approaching language analysis has a number of obvious advantages for applied linguistics. First of all, it frees us from the constraints of the model of varieties from which the Common Core hypothesis derives. Secondly, it focuses on language in use and so would appear to be in line with theories of process-oriented methodology. Thirdly, it subscribes to an essentially context-dependent view of language and is, therefore, in line with the LSP ("needs") approach to syllabus design.

7 HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

One thing that ESP, in conjunction with a great deal of recent research into the language of special fields and genres, has shown, is that the most important factor for the effective use of the language

is that the learner has command of the ways in which the grammar of the language works to perform specific functions in specific contexts. It is now well understood that grammatical forms are realizations of meaning not only at the semantic level but also at the rhetorical level.[4] It is understood that the communicative function of a form may be variety-specific or genre-specific, and, conversely, the variety or genre may govern the selection of grammatical form as well as of lexis. Thus, for example, we find the complex NPs of engineering texts ("precision height gauge", "machine tool location", etc.); the long comma-free sentences of insurance contracts; the use of post-nominal participles in definite NPs with an anaphoric function, which are found in some kinds of scientific writing ("The heat *added* increases the kinetic motion of the particles", as described by Swales 1981); and (normally) transitive verbs used without an object in recipes ("Place in the oven").

Such form-function relationships differ, of course, from one language to another. In English recipes, for example, we express *instruction* by use of the imperative verb, whereas in French the infinitive form is preferred. When *asking directions* in English, we typically use the interrogative, but the French, once again, typically use the infinitive "pour aller" (see Littlewood 1983, p.3 for discussion of some approaches to the teaching of such points).

While it is no doubt the case, as has often been observed, that the same grammatical forms and many lexical items can be used in very different situations (with some statistical variation), there is increasing evidence that there exist certain rhetorical dependencies in the sense that the choice of word and form relates to the communicative intent of the speaker or writer (see also Bloor and Bloor 1985).

Another, but closely related factor, is the importance in the language of what Widdowson 1983 refers to as "schemata", that is, "the cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory and which provide a basis for prediction" (p.34). This is to do with the relationship of utterance to the organization of discourse in terms of mental "frames of reference". Widdowson's view is that schematic units can provide the basis of the syllabus, but that these are related to some kind of general capacity rather than to specific use and that we do not, therefore, have to worry about the specificity of the language (pp.106f.). While we do not disagree with Widdowson's powerful arguments for the importance of the schematic level (p.57) of language knowledge, we believe that the development of language capacity in learners is much more closely related to their experience of language in specific use than Widdowson's arguments allow. This is as true of native speakers as it is of foreign language learners. As Swales (forthcoming) says, "Knowledge of the conventions of a genre is likely to be much greater in those who routinely or professionally operate with that genre rather than in those who become involved in it only occasionally."

Such knowledge, of the conventions of a genre as well as of grammatical-rhetorical dependencies common in a specific field, must be part of what the student learns from the language course, and since our understanding of them is, to say the least, only partial, it is not possible for us to list many of them in the form of a traditional teaching syllabus, even if this would assist us in teaching them. What we do know, however, is that unless the student is exposed to input of the appropriate "special" language, there is no way that such dependencies can be acquired. Informal conversation

about the weather will not help you very much to write an essay on climatic conditions.

This view of acquisition is not confined to ESP: the native speaker child learns to control his or her own environment through language (requesting food, protecting interests, demanding attention), and no given examples of language in use are context-free, except for "invented" or classroom examples. This is why we can usually recognize the sources of quotations from genres with which we are familiar. It is also clearly the case that native speakers do not have the language ability necessary for use in all situations even though they may have the strategies they require to "get by" in less familiar contexts.

This brings us to the role of teaching and studying (as opposed to "acquisition") in the LSP programme.

8 ACQUISITION, LEARNING AND TEACHING

There has been a great deal of work in recent years on issues in second language acquisition and learning.[8] Yet, in spite of lengthy research and even lengthier discussion, certain issues remain unresolved. One of these is the value of teaching about the language, and another is the value of learners' conscious study of aspects of the language. Questions such as "Does language awareness assist in language acquisition?" and "Does degree of metalinguistic knowledge correlate with accurate language production?" preserve the distinction, as Sorace (1985, pp.239ff.) expresses it, between "interlanguage knowledge" and "procedural knowledge".

Although some researchers (including Sorace 1985) have found evidence that conscious knowledge may have a beneficial influence on production, the debate continues between the "interface position", which permits the influence, and the "non-interface" position of Krashen, which states that there can be no direct influence from learned knowledge to acquired language. (For discussion see Ellis 1984, pp.150-55.)

There are considerable limitations in such studies, however, in so far as the LSP classroom is concerned. The fact is that, although the acquisition of the target language is the major aim of a language course, it is not the only one. We have already mentioned that the LSP syllabus designer gives considerable emphasis to Needs Analysis, and it is a fact that a Needs Analysis often reveals that learners require not only those aspects of the language that are "acquired" by native speaker children as part of the natural process, but also aspects of the language that are *taught* to native speakers or *learned* by them in the course of their formal education. Singleton and Little (1985, p.15) point out that

> The history of literate societies suggests that skills in producing well-formed long-turn discourse have to be taught.

This is not often recognized. Munby's "Taxonomy of Language Skills" (Munby 1978) includes, without distinction being drawn between them, such skills as those involved in phoneme discrimination (essentially "acquired") and those such as "forming the graphemes" or "use of dictionaries" (essentially "taught").

The point that we are making (and this is discussed further in Bloor 1984) is that the LSP (and

ERRATUM

Page 26, first paragraph, final sentence should read as follows:

"Such aspects of language use have little to do with the acquisition debate but are essential factors in syllabus design and language teaching."

ence between the acquisition of phonological rules and learning to read, or between the acquisition of the ability to express communicative functions (as described in Halliday 1975, for example) and the ability to write advertising copy. How to report the results of an experiment or how to lay out a business letter have to be taught to native speakers and foreigners alike.[6] Such aspects of language use have little to do with syllabus design and language teaching.

Some of the conflicts between the practitioners (for example Swan 1985) and the theorists (for example Widdowson 1985) almost certainly stem from a failure to make this distinction. Many teachers quarrel with theory on the grounds that it fails to provide any explanation for why the conscious study of language (particularly the written text) and the correction of students' written errors, do actually seem to work - at least if done within certain systematic pedagogical constraints.

Essentially, literacy is a "learned" (even a "taught"), rather than an "acquired" skill. Once reading and writing have been learnt, of course, it is likely that the practice of these skills supports language acquisition. The reading and writing of specific texts exposes the language user to increased linguistic input of grammar and lexis used with proper rhetorical purposes, thus supporting natural acquisition processes. Perera (1986), in an article on native speakers' language acquisition and writing, provides evidence that, in writing, chil-

dren use constructions that they do not use in speech. The evidence (mainly from children's writing) demonstrates that "particularly literary" structures (some types of constituent order, formal relative clauses and non-finite adverbial clauses, for example) are learned from reading rather than from oral-aural communication since they rarely occur in natural speech. The appearance of new written structures has been identified in the writing of children of twelve, and there is every reason to suppose that investigation into the written language of second language learners would yield the same results.

The task of the LSP teacher is, therefore, not only to provide the optimum conditions for language acquisition but also to teach the uses of language and literacy that are appropriate to the needs of the learners.

9 CONCLUSIONS

To summarize our position, we argue that

1. A major problem in identifying the theoretical base of ESP stems from the unfortunate influence that the Common Core Hypothesis has had on syllabus design and on applied linguists' perceptions of language learning. This is the result of a confusion between a model of a "theory of language" and a model of a "theory of language learning".

2. Once it is understood that linguistic competence (not just "limited competence") comes from language in use (and that this means language used in specific situations) the success of LSP may be accounted for.

3. LSP employs teaching strategies (in particular the "Deep End Strategy") that are incompatible with certain theories of language acquisition. We explain the success of these strategies by claiming not only that learners need to be involved in the use of language appropriate to their needs, but also that by its nature this language must be "specific". It is only by exposure to "specific" language that learners can learn the appropriate grammatical and lexical dependencies.

4. A language learner is as likely to acquire "the language" from one variety as from another, but the use of language, being geared to situation and participants, is learned in appropriate contexts. This view supports a theory of language use as the basis of language acquisition theory.

5. In most cases the teaching of a language involves much more than providing the optimum circumstances for acquisition. Although these are essential, the teacher is also responsible for teaching those aspects of language use that have to be taught even to native speakers: cultural conventions and the system and uses of literacy.

NOTES

1. The tendency has been for linguists who are not themselves ESP practitioners to stress the similarities between ESP and "general" English teaching, usually distorting the nature of ESP in the process. We must,

however, point to the work of Peter Strevens and John Sinclair, who are notable exceptions to this general trend. Strevens has been largely responsible for the development of ESP as a separate branch of ELT, and Sinclair has consistently encouraged ESP teaching and (of particular relevance to the concerns of this paper) the use of original source materials as the basis for course design. He continues to direct research at the University of Birmingham into the nature of text, which has serious implications for language teaching.

2. "Talking Shop", *ELT Journal* 36.1, p.30.

3. Although it is not central to the arguments in this paper, it is worth mentioning that ESP classes do not, in fact, always contain individuals working in precisely the same field. At Reading and Warwick Universities, among other places, courses have been held with heterogeneous groups of language learners, but which incorporate a strong element of individualized activity in order to allow students to use materials relevant to their own individual fields.

4. For work on rhetorical structure in English for Science and Technology, see Trimble 1985. For further discussion of the relationship of grammar to rhetorical structure, see Bloor and Bloor 1985.

5. Excellent overviews of this work can be found in Ellis 1984, Singleton and Little 1984, and Hyltenstam and Pienemann 1985.

6. There are also areas where the distinction is not so clear. Do we, for example, learn or

acquire spelling? Do we learn or acquire the ability to comprehend figurative language?

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